

ECONOMIC VITALITY COMMITTEE

Agenda – April 6, 2021

4pm to 5:15PM

VIA ZOOM

The Economic Vitality Committee is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting.

Link to Zoom: <https://tinyurl.com/ConcordEVC>

Meeting ID: 943 9005 3797

Passcode: 051278

- Call to Order
- Approval of Minutes & Administrative Matters
 - February 2, 2021; February 16, 2021; March 23, 2021
- Updates
 - Town
 - Concord Together
 - Committee members
- Project Updates
- Recommendations to Consider
- Other Business
- Open Session/Public Comment
- Adjournment

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM
February 2, 2021

PRESENT: John Boynton, Remon Karian, Mark Martines, Jennifer McGonigle, Jane Obbagy, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

ABSENT: Cato Anderson, Debra Stark, Jan Turnquist

ALSO PRESENT: Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Susan Bates, Select Board; Marcia Rasmussen, Kate Carr, John Hinkley, Karlen Reed

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-Chair John Boynton called the meeting to order.

MINUTES

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To Approve the Minutes of January 19, 2021.

John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

TOWN UPDATE

Town Manager Stephen Crane reported that Concord Public Works will be removing snow from the commercial districts on Wednesday evening. They have already been working 24 hours and will take the time to rest before tackling the next piece. He stated that the structure of the Economic Vitality function has been under discussion during the development of the FY22 budget. Currently this function is part of the Recreation Department. It is difficult to transfer this from a revolving fund to the general fund. The function will continue to exist in the budget while the problem is resolved.

On the issue of outdoor dining, Select Board Asst. Jeremy Romanul has been working on how to make this a permanent component of dining in Concord. The State gave the Town authority to issue licenses for outdoor dining and take-out during the emergency situation as long as police, fire, and public health concerns are met. At the end of the Gov. emergency order that would go away. Local Bylaws under the purview of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals govern capacity and parking. No fast food is permitted in Concord. Outdoor dining at establishments that hold an alcoholic beverages license need to meet additional access and safety standards.

Planning Director Marcia Rasmussen stated that a zoning bylaw amendment at Annual Town Meeting could make the changes permanent. In her opinion, it would be better for the Committee to recommend changes and lobby the Planning Board to put the Warrant before the Town rather than the Committee making the petition directly to Town Meeting because failed petitions may not come before the meeting again until two years have

passed. The same is not true for articles proposed by the Planning Board should they fail the first time.

It is anticipated that the Gov. Emergency Order will remain in force for some time. At its conclusion it is expected that the Gov. and legislature will propose a recovery plan. Ms. Rasmussen stated that many communities are responding in much the same way. Therefore, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council has been meeting to develop plans to make the changes permanent. Concord is represented in the meetings. Mr. Crane stated that supporting restaurants is a local priority.

In response to a question about how to present concerns to the Planning Board, it was suggested that a Motion be approved and sent to the Board for its consideration. Mr. Crane stated that the Planning Board will likely flesh out the committee recommendation and that local restaurants would probably urge their patrons to support the change. Ms. Rasmussen stated that the Planning Board is working on Town Meeting matters now and that she would convey the Committee's intentions to the Board.

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

The Economic Vitality Committee supports and encourages the Planning Board to bring a Zoning Bylaw Amendment to 2021 Annual Town Meeting to allow seasonal outdoor restaurant seating to be made a permanent provision of common victualler licenses without requiring additional parking.

John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Beth Williams stated that she continues to manage information and applications for a number and variety of grants available to local businesses. As soon as she becomes aware of information from the State, she posts it to the website. In the meantime, she has partnered with Lexington to apply for a State travel and tourism recovery grant and a transportation grant. Once approved this will be seed money to attract visitors from a 50-mile radius and to then move the visitors around our towns. She has a new tour in the making: history with a chocolate twist! Information is on the website and is intended to build partnerships in the community.

CONCORD TOGETHER

Jennifer Schunemann stated that 30 Concord-Carlisle high school volunteers stand ready to help local commercial entities build websites and introduce e-commerce and social media. The students have technology expertise and are a great free resource. Jennifer stated that she will make connections between them and potential businesses.

Concord Together has just launched a new shopping passport called Take-Out Ten. Customers eat in or take out from ten eateries and submit the forms to be eligible for \$200 in Gift of Concord cards.

Local cultural organizations such as Orchard House and Emerson Umbrella are doing virtual events to enable people to participate in art and culture during this difficult time.

COMMITTEE MEMBER UPDATES

Jennifer Schunemann stated that *Discover Concord* spring edition is getting ready for printing. Submit any information by the end of the month to be included.

Kate Carr of Concord Business Partnership stated that she is creating a calendar of speakers for the Partnership monthly meetings. She would like to be able to include someone from EVC.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

There was discussion amongst the Committee regarding the Warrant Article for making outdoor seating permanent and how this was vital now and in the future. Discussion went on to note the amazing and effective job that Beth Williams is doing. In that context, the Committee would like to see more of the economic vitality role. Mr. Crane had stated that this was being discussed during budget development; what could the committee do to reinforce this? The original charge of the Committee came out of the Long Range Plan and was more expansive; but what could the Committee do beyond responding to the effect of COVID on the local economy.

Stephen Crane stated that the activities of the Economic Vitality Committee are consistent with the Charge. Developing the role that Beth Williams fills in order to build for the future is difficult within a 1.8% Finance Committee Guideline, but the Town is committed. Set asides and incentive grants have been used in other communities. Longer term discussion will be needed. It was suggested that the committee could change its focus so that one meeting is to address long term issues and the other the critical short-term issues. On the other hand, the Committee could keep the flexibility to proactively plan to return to its stated mission.

Mark Martines stated that he would benefit from knowing more about the EV role. He knows that staff is doing components of the task, but there is nothing on the Town website regarding the commercial sector. Stephen Crane responded that the Town is building a new function and incorporating into the existing complicated structure. This takes some doing. Mark further asked: if the committee role is to advise, how hard should it push its views. Stephen Crane reported that Concord hosted a vaccine clinic for First Responders from Concord and 6 surrounding towns. 430 vaccines were administered. Lessons were learned to make the process more efficient, but what is needed is vaccine. Concord has 2,500 residents over 75 yet the State is providing only 100 doses per week. At that rate it will take all year to immunize the most vulnerable. There was discussion regarding local immunization sites.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Karlen Reed of Whit's End Rd. asked about the Committee schedule and that of Concord Together.

Susan Bates of the Select Board expressed her appreciation for the Economic Vitality Committee and all the hard it has accomplished in the short year it has been in existence.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5 PM.

John Boynton
Remon Karian

Aye
Aye

Mark Martines
Jennifer McGonigle
Jane Obbagy
Dawn Rennert
Jennifer Schunemann
Steven Verrill
Beth Williams

Aye
Aye
Aye
Aye
Aye
Aye
Aye

Respectfully submitted
Cato Anderson, Clerk
Approved: xxxyyzzz, 2021

DRAFT

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4:00 PM
February 16, 2021

PRESENT: Remon Karian, Mark Martines, Jennifer McGonigle, Jane Obbagy, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Jan Turnquist, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams

ABSENT: Cato Anderson, John Boynton, Debra Stark

ALSO PRESENT: Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Susan Bates, Select Board Liaison, John Hinkling, Marcia Rasmussen Department of Management and Planning, Erin Stevens, Public Information Officer, Karlen Reed,

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-Chair Jennifer Schunemann called the meeting to order and noted the presence of a quorum. Minutes of February 2 will be considered at the next meeting. She reminded the committee that Ruth Lauer will be retiring from taking minutes and a replacement is being sought.

TOWN UPDATE

Beth Williams reported that she had applied for a \$55,000 Travel and Tourism grant partnering with the town of Lexington. Funds will be used this season to encourage visitors to come back to the area. In addition, she noted that the Chocolate and History tour sold out and was very popular. She will run that again with additional stops. She is also partnering with Colonial Inn staff to create new tours. Beth noted that she participated in a virtual conference of tour operators from throughout the country and learned that safety and getting the COVID vaccine are of primary importance to those who are likely to be the first visitors –those over 65 with disposable income. Beth also noted the success of a Concord Together highlight – a Valentine Day promotion that got 300+responses. Concord Visitor Center staff will have the first organization meeting of the new season in April.

Marcia Rasmussen reported that she had brought the Committee recommendation regarding making permanent the option of outdoor dining by right at the conclusion of the COVID emergency to the Planning Board. The Board would like a letter from EVC setting out the parameters of the changes sought in the bylaw amendment. Research will need to be done regarding impact on current restaurants as well as any new restaurants to determine whether there are any unintended consequences. Staffing requirements were not waived. If further research can resolve any identified issues, the Planning Board indicated that it would be willing to bring the amendment to Annual Town Meeting. The timeline is tight as the next meeting is February 23 and the Coordination Meeting is on February 27. Jennifer Schunemann agreed to take the lead on drafting a letter that seeks permanent parking relief and additional outdoor seating. Mark Martines asked Marcia if she could assist in a recommendation that could note the “low hanging fruit” inherent in the request. Marcia stated that unintended consequences such as impact on parking should be addressed. Mark noted that some restaurants are using private space for outdoor dining while others are making use of public space that would be the subject of the amendment. Would this bylaw amendment preserve the impact on private parking and pavement use, or would it provide prospective relief? Jennifer Schunemann stated that impact on private space is not the focus of this proposal, rather the ripple effect on public parking. Marcia stated that analysis from 2012 and 2018 indicate that there is sufficient public parking available to absorb the change.

Remon Karian stated that the goal of the restaurateurs is to increase seats by adding outdoor seasonal seating, not to transfer current indoor seating to outside seasonally. Capacity reductions during the emergency have reduced the revenue possibilities. Beth Williams stated that the primary municipal feedback is a complaint about the extra trash in public areas due to take-out food and picnics that the Town has supported with additional picnic tables in the commercial districts. Foot traffic has increased; this is good. Shopping has increased during the wait time for take-out food. But trash has been the unintended consequence. Complaints are from both residents and other merchants about the appearance of the Center.

Dawn Rennert asked whether the Planning Board might at least be receptive to an extension of the conditions allowed by the Emergency Order. Marcia stated that 1) the change proposed would be a change in the culture of the community and 2) when the emergency expires there will be 60-day period automatically extending the dining changes. Probably all is well for the upcoming season. The bylaw changes to be brought to Town Meeting would affect future conditions and culture. Marcia stated that it is not too soon to seek letters of support from the community. There are tensions between retail and food businesses that center on consuming parking. Jane Obbagy asked whether the amendment to increase seating would affect the requirements for restrooms.

EVC LONG RANGE ISSUES

Ms. Schunemann reminded the Committee that it had recently had a discussion about the Charge and original goals of the Committee when formed by the Select Board. Almost immediately the focus turned from a study of the four retail districts and their connections to the historical and cultural resources that bring tourists to Concord and are enjoyed by the citizens of the Town, to a short-term focus on addressing the economic impact of COVID on the commercial sector of the community. She asked whether in the opinion of Committee members it was time to focus on longer term issues as outlined in the Charge.

There was rich discussion regarding longer term issues such as the sewer improvement fee impact on reusing vacant buildings for businesses with a more intense need for water and sewer, careful attention to the retail mix needed to bolster the community culture, short-term reuse of vacant buildings for art and cultural activities, potential contacts with non-resident landlords, consultation with Public Works Committee regarding sewer capacity issues, prohibitive local fees. The consensus of the meeting was to reallocate committee time between short term and longer-term issues and that a sub-group could begin to tackle information leading to an educational campaign. The information would be useful to both taxpayers and to potential new businesses. This could lead to marketing for the Town regarding grants, business development and mentoring. Concord places a premium on unique shops and businesses that will find it more difficult to locate here than a big box franchise store would. It was further agreed that a short list of questions would be developed to survey current establishments on the difficulties and benefits of having a business in Concord.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mark Martines reminded the Committee of the work being undertaken to prepare for the reuse of the 2229 Main St. Superfund site. In his opinion, it is a unique opportunity to sustain and grow the commercial tax base in Concord. The report is available, and the comment period is open for input. He believes that the EVC should comment to the Select Board regarding the best reuse plan. Steve Verrill noted that this a unique parcel and it is hard to imagine any similar sized parcel that could provide the benefits to commercial.

Jennifer Schunemann stated that she sees before the Committee both short term activity to stabilize the existing business community, medium range goals to remove obstacles to bringing a business to Concord, and long-term goals of creating a 10-year map of growing the commercial center.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:

To adjourn the meeting at 5 PM.

Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Jane Obbagy	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted
Cato Anderson, Clerk
Approved: xxxyyyzzz, 2021

DRAFT

Economic Vitality Committee
Virtual Meeting, 4 PM
March 23, 2021

PRESENT: Cato Anderson, John Boynton, Remon Karian, Mark Martines, Jennifer McGonigle, Dawn Rennert, Jennifer Schunemann, Debra Stark, Jan Turnquist, Steven Verrill, Beth Williams, Visitor and Tourism Services Manager

ABSENT: Jane Obbagy

ALSO PRESENT: Stephen Crane, Town Manager; Jeremy Romanul, Select Board Asst.; Susan Bates Select Board Liaison; Marie Foley, Karlen Reed, Erin Stevens Public Information Officer

CALL TO ORDER AND ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Co-Chair Jennifer Schunemann stated that she would take the lead at the meeting. She noted that Ruth Lauer continues to intend to resign her duties and asked anyone with potential replacements to to make them known. Ms. Schunemann stated that Jane Obbagy will no longer represent the Chamber and that Marie Foley of Revolutionary Concord will step up to the role as soon as she has been appointed by the Select Board.

MINUTES

Upon a motion duly made and seconded, it was:

UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:
To Approve the Minutes of March 09, 2021.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Jennifer Schunemann	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

TOWN UPDATE

Beth Williams stated that the Visitor Center will be open by April 5 and fully staffed by April 19. While the Town will be celebrating Patriots Day activities differently this year, visitors are already beginning to drop by the Center. The goal is to make the April season fun with mostly virtual events. Businesses, cultural institutions, non-profits, and residents are being asked to join in to create a spirit. Marie Foley has suitable decorations available. One activity is to post photos on Facebook to be eligible for token prizes. Erin Stevens offered to post the flyer on Town social media.

MMN and the Public Ceremonies and Celebrations Committee are collaborating to create a parade video of years past interspersed with short clips of the current day from all Units that have participated in the past. This will run on a loop.

The newly published *Ecology along Concord Trails* book is available for purchase at the Visitor Center.

Town Manager Stephen Crane reported that the Select Board has voted to re-institute parking meter enforcement by April 19 and continuing until the end of FY21. Jeremy

Romanul, the Select Board Asst. has begun outreach to those holding common victualler and/or alcoholic beverages licenses that had permits for seasonal outdoor dining to inform them the permit is extended to this season if the conditions of service have not changed. Mr. Crane stated that the Town is learning more about new federal recovery efforts. Some assistance will be revenue and he is interested in input of where and how it should be directed.

Mr. Crane stated that the Town had submitted an application to set up a regional vaccination site at either the high school parking lot or the former Kmart. It is anticipated that vaccines will become available soon. There are 5,000 residents aged 60 and over in Concord, 4,000 have been vaccinated.

Beth Williams stated that she had applied for a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) in conjunction with Lexington and Arlington to learn more about numbers of employees, number of employers, retail sales, hotels and meals in order to build the economic impact of tourism in the region. This will generate information for a benchmark study also useful to new businesses. She noted that one more Concord business has applied and received a micro enterprise grant of \$10,000. This brings the total in Concord to 5. She is trying to make it known that many businesses such as artists are eligible and will send information to the Emerson Umbrella.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS UPDATE

Debra Stark reported that she is hard at work with many consultants regarding the build-out of the former West Concord 5&10 into Debra's Natural Gourmet. She declared that it is frustrating coming before departments and committees that require many incremental steps for approval, sometimes to change their minds.

John Boynton stated that Bradford Mill has been planning and is now ready to launch the Concord Sign Museum. He envisions 20 +/- signs from historic Concord enterprises that will hang in the three common areas of the mill and available for self-guided tours during the week from 9AM - 5PM. QR codes will take the visitor to the website to learn more about the significance and history. The West Concord 5&10 sign will be highlighted. He was congratulated for this addition to the West Concord Cultural district. Jan Turnquist noted that Orchard House had an old sign that she would like to be protected and preserved.

Dawn Rennert commended these great ideas and stated that she is seeing more visitors as well as regular patrons, perhaps due to beautiful weather. Marie Foley concurred, stating that everyone seems to have a lighter step. Marie explained that the Concord Chamber of Commerce has joined something called Chamber Hub, a national organization that allows sharing of resources. Bedford, Billerica, Burlington, and Lowell are other Chambers in the region that have also joined. Each will still operate independently. She stated that the local Chamber would be developing a strategizing team to have a membership drive and target different businesses, including home businesses. The Chamber has already spoken with Rotary, Concord Business Partnership and the Town about the plans.

Mark Martines asked for Marie's best description of the Chamber mission. He has some frustration in the fragmentation of the Chamber, Concord Business Partnership, and Concord Together. He believes that the Economic Vitality Committee is the result of many in town pressing for how the entities can work together and better fit with the Town. He stated that the challenge is always resources and time. A goal should be to eliminate redundancy. Marie Foley stated that answers will be forthcoming in a mission statement that fosters business awareness and moves toward being a cohesive resource for all

groups. In response to a question regarding participation from West Concord businesses, where ~~all the so much~~ recent vibrancy comes from, Marie stated that no West Concord representation exists at the moment, but that it is intended to bring them on board. Marie stated that the Chamber website will continue, although refreshed to make it more vibrant and user-friendly. It will have a marketing services plan.

Cato Anderson provided a screen share of ideas to reduce barriers and ease the process for potential new businesses. He mentioned a brochure created by the city of Worcester. In his opinion, what is needed is guidance, fewer unrelated departmental demands, and more support from the Town. Mark Martines stated that this is an opportunity for the Town to be proactive and make the commercial sector a priority. As a Town we need to find a way to balance compliance requirements with reasonable responses to regulations. John Boynton stated that the perception that Concord is unfriendly to business is rooted in decades of frustration. This is a new era, and it is time to be optimistic. It is true that permitting is expensive and that obstacles are well known. Concord Business Partnership has long recommended a permit coordinator in the Town. The EVC has a role to play and could be helpful in gathering information to be provided to potential business owners. The enthusiasm of the EVC will be important in making a concentrated effort to form alliances with the Town.

Debra Stark stated that she recognizes the Town is trying, but it is still almost enough to throw in the towel. Her consultants state that Concord is well known as the most difficult entity to work with as it requires implementation of the letter of the law and never the spirit of the law. In her opinion, the process must be made simpler and more realistic.

Jennifer Schunemann queried whether the obstacles noted are due to complexity or interpretation. Debra ~~Start Stark~~ replied that each department is ready and eager to struggle with each issue. Jan Turnquist stated that it is not limited to a focus on the letter of the law or businesses. She stated that the School of Philosophy has been closed for seven years due to a discrepancy of understanding between Concord rules and that of the Boston Architectural Access Board that permitted the School project. Steve Verrill stated that 10 years ago the Natural Resources Commission seemed to have the self-imposed duty of stopping or making everything more difficult and running up bills for petitioners. The Town needs to change its focus to make it easier.

Jennifer Schunemann noted that committee members are all volunteers. Perhaps what we are seeing is simply differing opinion and the committees themselves could use more guidance on regulation and Town codes. Mark Martines noted that code enforcement is the purview of the Building Commissioner, an employee not a volunteer. It is a very powerful job. The tone for enforcement should be being set by the Town Manager and Select Board. Debra Stark agreed and stated that EVC and others need to help applicants survive the process. In response to a question by Dawn Rennert about which committees had roles in the process, it was stated that Planning Board, Board of Health, Historic Districts Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals. Mark Martines stated that there is building by right and only when seeking variances does ZBA get involved. John Boynton stated that he has seen the letter of the law exhibited in the Library construction process when the Corporation wanted to install a kitchen but was blocked by the Board of Health. Debra Stark suggested that we should make use of this wonderful Zoom function that we have learned all about and schedule such meetings to bring all parties together at one time for a discussion and feedback. Mark Martines stated that history has proved expensive and

tenants are not willing to make an investment if the outcome is possibly so fragile. Has the tone changed? Actions have not demonstrated a change.

Remon Karian stated that the Town has a reputation; how do we move forward? Can we learn from best practices of other towns? John Boynton stated that EVC could pursue this as a special project, dedicating meetings to preparing and expanding on the information provided by Cato Anderson. Worcester seems to be a great place to start. What would be useful is transparency and welcoming practices. Realtors are pulling together to welcome new residents; we should do something similar for businesses. Some things cannot be “fixed” but we can be transparent. Cato Anderson stated that more and more towns have an Economic Viability Coordinator to “quarterback” the process. John Boynton stated that the next meeting would be devoted to this topic and guests invited to share their experiences. Henry Dane has been helpful over the years

PUBLIC COMMENT

Karlen Reed of Whit’s End Rd. stated that she was pleased that the focus of the Committee could finally shift away from the trials of COVID and begin to focus on the Charge of creating a bridge between Town Government and businesses.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a Motion duly made and seconded, it was
UNANIMOUSLY VOTED by roll call:
To adjourn the meeting at 5:15 PM.

Cato Anderson	Aye
John Boynton	Aye
Remon Karian	Aye
Mark Martines	Aye
Jennifer McGonigle	Aye
Dawn Rennert	Aye
Debra Stark	Aye
Jan Turnquist	Aye
Steven Verrill	Aye
Beth Williams	Aye

Respectfully submitted
Cato Anderson, Clerk
Approved: xxxyyyzzz, 2021